

TRANSLATION SAMPLE

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# THE AGE OF ANIME

## A HISTORY OF JAPANESE ANIMATION





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## 8. DEUS EX MECHA



Evangelion



Japan manufactured the first robot in 1928. Created by Makato Nishimura, the robot was called Gakutensoku, and it was displayed in exhibitions around the country. Nishimura put a lot of time into making his robot

as humanlike as possible. In addition to being able to move its limbs, it could also change its facial expressions. So the maid robots of anime and the HRP-4C that mimics the expressions and features of a young woman are not just fetishes brought on by the anime mania. They are a faithful continuation of the tradition of Japanese technology.

In Western popular culture the robot, and often the machine in itself, is typically a threat to the humanity of people and a frightening Faustian creation, something that should not even exist. In Japanese popular culture robots are servants of people, usually benevolent rather than emotionless monsters. Yet again, Astro Boy is the perfect example of that.

Seeing machines, and robots along them, as essentially positive creatures could be seen to stem from the experiences of the 19th century. Ever since Commodore Perry and his black steamships paid Japan "a friendly naval visit" in 1853 and gifted the emperor with samples of the wonders of the

West — for instance a model railway powered by steam — has modernization been Japan's great national project. As Hayao Miyazaki's *Nausicaa* said, the Japanese are a proud people, so the realization of their backwardness came as a great shock, which initiated extensive reforms with the appropriate growing pains. But the results were great as well: within 50 years the 17th century feudal society turned into a modern military power.

After the war that ended miserably Japan refused to give up, and if anything the country picked up its pace. The rebuilding of the ravaged country, the rise of industry in the 1950's, and taking over the world market with products that were manufactured in a land with no natural resources — all this proved that with technology and its own resourcefulness the country could achieve greater victories than it ever could by war. Japan might have lost the war, but thanks to its technology it won the peace, and did it in an unbeatable way.

Mecha anime is as commercial as entertainmet gets. The nature of most mecha series is exactly what it looks like. They are half-hour long animated toy commercials, starring a complex gadget whose scale model is something to beg your



dad to buy you. The quality of mecha stories has ranged from sandbox games to complicated space adventures spanning decades. Similarly, the enemy image in mecha has varied from comical fools to powerful warlords. An impressive adversary, such as Char Aznable in *Gundam*, could become popular enough to beat the actual protagonist of the story.

The traditional problem with hero stories is that the hero is an unbelievably one-dimensional and tedious guy. In the Western narrative the protagonist often has a sidekick, who gets to be a colorful and funny character, such as Kaptah or Sancho Panza. The East favors a different kind of solution, in which the opponent is made realistic and interesting. A convincing enemy makes also the hero look better.

At its best, mecha anime is able to depict where we are today. If it wants to, it can discuss the hopes and fears of its time. In the early 1980's, during the most chilling years of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union shot down a Korean passenger plane and people in Europe were marching for peace, a total nuclear destruction loomed in the background of mecha stories. In the productions of the 1990's the gaze turned inwards into the depths of man. In the remake of the original *Gundam* in the 2000's, the ideological conflicts of superpower politics once so obvious, were ignored almost entirely.

There is a clear reason for the development of mecha into complex space sagas, and on the other hand character-driven dramas. Mecha has grown along with its audience. The children who grew up watching *Mazinger Z* in the early 1970's wanted to see something more convincing and richly constructed as teenagers at the turn of the 1980's, and they got *Gundam*. As young adults in the late 1980's, they were drawn to stories with political scheming, pressure from superiors, and hard personal decisions, so they watched *Patlabor*. Whether these latter shows constitute mecha anime anymore, is a good question. They reside in the outskirts of mecha, where only the form is mecha. As a logical ending in the 1990's, *Evangelion*, which tore mecha anime to the ground, was thrown at their faces.

## Robots rule the 1970's

After creating *Mazinger Z*, Go Nagai became a sought-after animator. When *Mazinger Z*'s sequel *Great Mazinger* was on the air, Nagai developed his next invention, which became a staple in mecha series for the whole decade: the gattai robot. A gattai robot was composed of several parts, whose pilots made a showy combination into one big hero robot. The long combination animations were recycled in one episode after another, sometimes many times in a single episode.<sup>62</sup>

Created in 1974, the first gattai series was *Getter Robo*. The manga version was aimed at teenagers, but the anime was a pure children's series without any blood fests. Explosions and wreckages were practically clinical. Metal cracked with loud noises, sheet-metal fractured and parts were flying, but people — good or bad — always came out alright. The heroes' actions behind the controls of the mecha resembled martial arts (the performers are professionals, don't try this at home), since the robots were piloted by versatile martial artist Ryoma, young rebellious Hayato and Judo master Musashi.

In the course of the show, masses of megasauruses attacked the heroes: a total of 60 during 51 episodes, in addition to submarineplesiosauruses and mutant seaweeds. The show's huge success was anything but weakened by the fact that the kettledrum-driven theme song was sung by Isao Sasaki, another master of the testosterone-fuelled Super Robot themes, and Sasaki's masculine energy, as well as that of singer Ichiro Mizuki, made the series of that decade better than they actually were — at least until the OP animation ended and the episode of the week began.

And of course the audience wanted more. In 1975 Go Nagai created not only *UFO Robo Grendizer* and *Kotetsu Jeeg*, but also *Getter Robo G* and joint TV specials and movies of *Mazinger* and *Getter Robo*. In the 1990's *Getter Robo* was revived in the series *Getter Robo Go*, which was followed by *Shin Getter Robo*, which was in turn followed by *New Getter Robo*. Each new *Getter Robo* was bigger than its predecessor, even more massive, more powerful, faster, and more of everything. *Getter Robo* expanded into ridiculousness, providing it wasn't that already.

Go Nagai's next idea was an adaptation of an old theme: what if foreign parts were attached to a human? What if these parts would make the pilot itself a mecha? In *Kotetsu Jeeg*, the young boy Astro — no, race car driver Hiroshi Shiba gets into a serious accident, from which his genius doctor father saves him. One day Hiroshi arrives at his father's laboratory and sees a hologram recording: "If you're watching this, it means that I've been killed," professor Shiba explains to his son. The country is threatened by beasts from the past, Queen Himika and her terracotta warriors, thousands of whom were buried in ancient times all around Japan. But not to worry, because an ancient bronze bell was placed inside Hiroshi, and using the bell's power Hiroshi is able to transform into the head of the mecha robot Jeeg and control its steely body. In order for Hiroshi to not have to fight alone and also deal with his complicated double life as a race car driver and a superhero, his helpful dead father gave his assistant, the sassy miss Micchi Uzuki and the robot horse Panzeroid to Hiroshi's service.



Based on the previous, it would be hard to believe it but Kotetsu Jeeg is perhaps the most watchable of Go Nagai's robot series. The ideas are interesting, and like Siegel's and Schuster's original Superman, Hiroshi with his bronze bell gets into trouble again and again having to be in two places at once. The theme song boasts the most striking lyrics of robot series, with Ichiro Mizuki getting to sing "bam" about 122 times in two minutes.

UFO Robo Grendizer was particularly popular in France under the French title Goldorak. From there it ended up on Asterix. Shocked by the invasion of manga, old Uderzo drew perhaps the weakest of the Asterix albums, in which waltdisney-creatures were threatened by manga monsters, whose ship was taken from Goldorak.

Age of innovation was quickly over. During 1976-1979 eighteen different Super Robot series were produced, all of which resembled each other. The worst years were between 1976 and 1977, when half of TV anime was robot anime with the most peculiar titles. New shows in 1976 included Daiku Maryu Gaiking, Go Wapper 5 Godam, Ufo Senshi Daiapolon, Chodenji Robot Combattler V, Groizer X, Blocker Gundam V Machine Blaster and Magne Robot Gaikin. New shows in 1977 included Gasshin Sentai Mekander Robot, Wakusei Robot Danguard Ace, Chogattai Najutsu Robot Ginguiser, Hyoga Senshi Guyslugger, Chodenji Machine Voltes V, Chojin Sentai Balatack, Kyoryu Daisenso Ai-Zenborg and Muteki Chojin Zambot 3. At least the naming policy originating from Tetsujin 28 go was still left.

It was possible to differentiate between the robots only by the shape of their helmets. Each robot was built by the father of a young man. In each series an annoying halfwit wanted to take over the world with gadgets that competed in strangeness. There was at least some variation with every other theme song being sung by Isao Sasaki and every other by Ichiro Mizuki.

## Gundam's sunrise

In 1979 the trend wore thin. Outside Japan such phenomenal pictures as Star Wars were produced, but on the Japanese soil they were still airing half-hour long toy commercials, whose science rubbish didn't have a hint of realism in it. No one saw any reason to change anything, because the concept worked, people were used to it, and this is how it had always been done.

However, a contrarian voice rose from the group: that of Yoshiyuki Tomino (b. 1941). Tomino had graduated from film school only to find out that there was no work in the



Kiddō Senshi Gundam MS IGLOO: Mokushiroku 0079 (2006)

industry. His solution to the most common situation in the world was to get into the animation business. At Mushi, he instantly joined the Astro Boy production team, and during the following decades directed a large number of TV anime episodes at different studios, according to himself more episodes perhaps than anyone else. According to Tomino, he was greatly influenced by Kurosawa's action films, Ozu's silent films and the 1950 American sci-fi film Destination Moon. "It is completely outdated, but in its time it was groundbreaking. Its way of depicting space had a great influence on me."

The fascinating subject of space colonies already occupied Tomino's mind when he saw Hollywood's latest worldwide success, Star Wars, in 1977. In the wake of Star Wars a new sci-fi boom began to soar, bringing forth new space series, which had nearly been forgotten by Western TV channels. Moonbase Alpha and Battlestar Galactica were on top of the pile.

Star Wars had Tomino fume. "I was bitter and frustrated. In Hollywood it was possible to make films like Star Wars with actors, whereas in Japan we were, — actually I was — in a position, where stories had to be written as robot anime. And I don't even especially like robot anime!"<sup>182</sup>

The Tokusatsu series didn't present a better way for Tomino to satisfy his ambitions, since they were a far cry from realism. Elsewhere in the world special effects were used to tell a story, in Japan special effects were used to showcase special effects. Hayao Miyazaki has an anecdote about how a young man came to see him at Studio Ghibli, a man who wanted to become an animator to draw explosions. When he was asked what he wanted to draw before and after the explosion, he had no answer.

It would be an understatement to say that Tomino's idea about a grandiose story based in space colonies in a similar





Gundam: Char and Rei

vein to Star Wars would be hard to sell. Tomino's concept broke all known rules. His script was a story with a continuous plot and subplots. The episodes did not include the obligatory new weekly robot device. He aimed to give his characters a personality and credibility. The adversaries were no longer comical heavies, but normal people who just had goals of their own. The rebellious troops of the Principality of Zeon, who were dressed in uniforms resembling the Third Reich, fought under an adaptation of the German warflag for the independence and freedom of the space colonies against the Earth Federation, who had left them in trouble and broken their promises many times. Both parties used dirty tricks and had skeletons in the closet. The setting was far from black and white.

The story was considered too difficult for children. Besides, the Super Robot mania was waning. However, Tomino was lucky to get Yoshikazu Yasuhiko and Kunio Okawara as his mechanical designers, with whom he had previously collaborated on *Zambot 3*. Childish rocket fists and eye lasers were thrown overboard. Instead, in the name of realism the mecha were armed with machine guns and a backpack full of rocket launchers. Previously having been shaped like round sauna stoves, the mecha were now designed as functionally angular. The new mecha design became the standard in the business<sup>64</sup>. But even Tomino was not completely free of all Super Robot clichés in 1979. The worst example of this is Gundam's origin. Its prototype was of course designed by main protagonist Amuro Rei's deceased father.

The producers reluctantly agreed to finance the effort, but demanded a few changes, of which the most notorious was dictated by the toy industry: the G-Armor, an additional device that helped the mecha change into a tank or a flying gadget. The toy companies made billions of yens later on through franchising deals<sup>65</sup>. The budget proposal of the

sponsors gathered by Nagoya TV was still meager and the work team of Nippon Sunrise studio was small, but Tomino could still be happy that his show even got on the air. The date was April 7, 1979, at 5.30 PM, the channels were Nagoya TV and Asahi TV, and the show that was about to start was the undeniable milestone of anime, *Kidō Senshi Gundam* (Mobile Suit Gundam).

There was just one little problem. Nobody watched Gundam.

The ratings in NagoyaTV's own service area were 5,3 % with no change in sight.

Originally intended to run for a year, it was canceled halfway through the series. Sunrise was given a month to finish the story, and so the series became to span 43 episodes. The events of the last ten episodes were cut down to four.

As soon as the decision to cancel the show was made, strange things began to happen. Bandai got hold of Gundam's toy merchandizing, and the models started to sell instantly. The ratings grew fast. Gundam's last episode was aired in January 1980, and in February Nagoya TV began a rerun of the show. People were talking, and what is most amazing, the series was watched by high school girls. At one point it was estimated that 60 % of the audience was high school girls, because they liked the character of Yoshikazu Yasuhiko. By 1982 Gundam had aired five times in Nagoya TV's home province of Aichi. The last rerun gathered an audience of 29,1 % at its highest<sup>66</sup>. Super Robots were dead. Mecha was born.

The same thing happened to Gundam that had happened to Star Trek and Yamato. It took a while before the right audience found it. Maybe it's not something to wonder about. No one had been told that someone had replaced Super Robots with a mecha series that could have an elaborate story with interesting characters. It must have also been confusing that the animation of the first Gundam did not differ from the robot anime of the time. When watching a compilation of the OP animations of the robot and mecha series from 1972 to 1990, the first arresting theme song, whose high quality stands out, is *Macross* from 1982. It really makes you sit up and take notice. It immediately tells you that something important is about to happen. With Gundam, that's not the case. The opening of Gundam contains the usual collection of running and jumping characters and a posing fighter robot. The theme song is insignificant. It would be good to watch the show sometimes instead of just watching the opening animation and then changing the channel.

## Newtype

It is year 0079 of the Universal Century calendar. Conflicts between space colonies built in Earth's orbit and the Earth



Federation have escalated so badly that one of the colonies has declared itself as the independent Principality of Zeon. A war of independence starts immediately, influencing the whole inhabited universe. Zeon's upper hand is powerful weaponry: the Mobile Suits, the 18-meter-long two-legged and two-armed ships that look like big robots, whose pilots are able to do complex manoeuvres on the surface of planets as well as in space. The war becomes atrocious. In the beginning of Gundam half of humanity has perished and the frontline is at a stalemate for eight months with no solution in sight.

The warship White Base of the Earth Federation arrives in colony Side 7 to pick up the newest power suit prototypes that were manufactured there, the RX-78 Gundams. In the midst of the pick-up, a Zentradi recon team attacks the colony against its orders. 15-year-old Amuro Rei, whose father has designed the new prototypes, jumps inside a mecha and starts defending his home country. The White Base evacuates all possible survivors



GundamZ

from the colony, including Amuro Rei who stopped the attack, and who has no idea how he was able to control the prototype so well on his first try.

Not every one is fit to pilot a Gundam. The pilot has to be a newtype. In the Gundam world a newtype is the latest stage of human evolution, a mutation that has adapted to living in space, with an exceptional ability to perceive space, which is sometimes called the sixth sense. The elevated spiritual awareness of the newtypes helps them to assimilate Gundam as part of themselves. The phenomenon is close to psychokinesis, of which some newtypes can give amazing examples. Newtypes can also sense another newtype, and they are able to communicate using telepathy. Amuro Rei is a newtype, and his adversary Char Aznable develops into one as well.

Amuro Rei's development into a reliable pilot is full of distress. After the White Base safely returns to Earth, a strict training begins. Since newtypes know they are different from others, Amuro becomes introverted and closed. This makes him look unreliable, and when he hears his commanders contemplating whether he should be replaced by someone else, he jumps in his Gundam and flees the base. But of course Amuro returns at the best possible moment to save the White Base that was attacked.

Char Aznable, whose name is taken from chanson singer Charles Aznavour (the Japanese have always loved French singers more than you can guess), begins to embrace Zeon's authoritarian philosophy during the war. His aim is to free all those unhappy souls who live under the yoke of gravity. In time he succeeds in becoming the dictator of the Zeon republic.

Amuro's crush, the White Base beauty Matilda Ajan gets killed, and the newtype Lalah Sune, who was rescued by Char Aznable from an Indian brothel dies in an attack by the Earth Federation. Amuro and Char become sworn enemies. Their fights are gigantic, but they also include surprising chivalry. They are ruthless and at the same time as dignified as two duelling noblemen. Toru Furuya's (Rei) and Shuuichi Ikeda's (Char) collaboration as the voices of the main characters became a classic example of successful voice acting, in which mutual listening and living in the moment are more important than just playing your own role.

However, the war hero of the Earth Federation is not Amuro Rei, but Bright Noa (Hirotaka Suzuoki), who has to assume responsibility for the White Base during Char Aznable's attack and transport the ship and its crew safely to Earth. Bright Noa is an unwavering commander, who guides Rei to become a responsible soldier by his own example and by slapping the



## Real robot technology

The realistic mecha trend started by Gundam was supported by carefully calculated science, of which articles were first published in the scifi magazine *Out*, and then compiled in the fan books issued by Sunrise and Bandai. The latest officially approved book in the field is *MS Encyclopedia 2003*. Bandai hired Shigeru Morita to write scientific and technological articles to be published. Universal Century's technology (power sources, laser cannons and defensive shields) is based on the properties of the Minovsky particles invented in U.C. 0065. The Minovsky-Ionesco nuclear reactor was the first pure fusion reactor, whose neutron emission was zero.

Incidentally, the make-up of the fusion reactor is the same as that of a real fusion reactor, but it has been added with a particle factor that makes its efficiency higher than in physics today. When Minovsky particles spread in large numbers to the environment, they disrupt low-frequency radio radiation. At the same time they interfere with circuitry and destroy all unprotected electronics in the same way as the electromagnetic pulse created by a nuclear explosion. Radars and long-range wireless communication systems become useless, and visible light looks foggy. The phenomenon is called the Minovsky Effect. The only way to shield from this particle pollution is massive and expensive protection of electronics. The protection might be possible in spacecraft and warships, but it is impossible to install shields for instance on guided missiles. This is why Zeon started to develop a new kind of weapon, which became known as the Mobile Suit. The Gundams of Earth and the Zakus of Zeon move in space using AMBAC technology. Active Mass Balance Auto-Control is based on Newton's laws of motion. The AMBAC system



ensures that the Gundam's mass stays in balance and the machine is controllable in zero gravity.

hesitant Rei in the face if need be. As a classically handsome man Bright was perhaps to the liking of high school girls.

Tomino's original idea was to kill Amuro Rei halfway through the series, after which the White Base would have to form an alliance with Char Aznable. Char would be given a red Gundam and he would assume control of the Principality of Zeon, after which the White Base would have to fight against Char after all. Tomino published this version of the story in the Gundam novels, which came out right after the series ended. The same themes were used in the anime sequels *Zeta Gundam* and *Char's Counterattack*.

Before the sequels Tomino was given the opportunity to republish the TV series as a movie trilogy in the form he

originally intended it. The first two films included material from the show edited into four hours, but the concluding part included as much as 70 % of new material. Most of Zeon's robots and Gundam's weaponry was left on the editing room floor. What was left was simplified war scifi, with the examination of the essence of the newtype having the leading role<sup>67</sup>.

## Universal Century

Aired in 1985, the second TV series *Zeta Gundam* was even darker than the first. The main characters were old acquaintances, but the focus had shifted from character depiction to political games. The Earth Federation and especially its elite team





Kunio Okawara: Mobile Suit Gundam Illustration World



the Titans were now clearly the enemies, and the part of the hero was played by the resistance organization AEUG, which opposed the tyranny of Earth. The mechanical designing was divided between Kunio Okawara, Kazumi Fujita and the offbeat heavy metal fan Mamoru Nagano. Many fans think Z Gundam is still if not the best, at least the second best Gundam title. The OP song of the second half of the series, Hiroko Moriguchi's Russian-style *Mizu no hoshi e ai wo komete*, is one of the OP classics that you have to master before heading to karaoke.

The story continued in ZZ Gundam in 1986. Makoto Kobayashi's and Yutaka Izubuchi's mecha were the musciest ever, looking like they were wearing the trendy shoulder pads of the 1980's. Zeta Gundam had been oppressive to watch, so ZZ Gundam was made lighter and humoristic. The situational comedy of the show just felt a bit artificial and forced, especially as the opening song was Hironobu Kageyama's *Anime jya nai* ("This is not anime"). The young Judau Ashta was raised as the new protagonist, who is talkative but also an efficient fighter. Amuro Rei and Char Aznable were out of the picture. The 14-year feud between the men, as well as the war between Zeon and the Earth Federation, finally received a conclusion in the film *Char's Counterattack* (*Gyakushuu no Char*, 1988).

For Gundam's 10th anniversary the first Gundam OVA was published, *Kidou Senshi Gundam 0080: pocket no naka no sensou*. Macross's Haruhiko Mikimoto was hired as character designer, and the mecha were designed by Yutaka Izubuchi. 0080 written by Gainax's Hiroyuki Yamaga was a completely different kind of Gundam: for one, it was not directed by Yoshiyuki Tomino. The anime is a side story of a boy named Alfred Izuruha, who lives in a neutral space colony. Childishly believing in the nobility of war, a gruesome reality opens up to Alfred when a Zentradi pilot crash-lands on the colony. The title 0080 refers to the year when the plot takes place by Universal Century's chronology.

The next Gundam OVA was *Kido Senshi Gundam* that ballooned into 13 episodes: 0083 *Stardust Memory*, which came out during 1991-1992. In the time of its creation it was the most expensive video animation ever made, raising the quality of Gundam's animation to the top of its time. The story returned to time before Z Gundam, when the elite team of the Earth Federation, the Titans, was formed. Tomino was still absent, because he had other engagements. He and Okawara were then busily planning Gundam F91. Gundam F91 was originally supposed to be a 50-part TV series, but even though Tomino rewrote the story many times, it just didn't work. So it was released as a film, which was very fast-paced and confusing.



Gundam GAT-X105 (Gundam SEED)

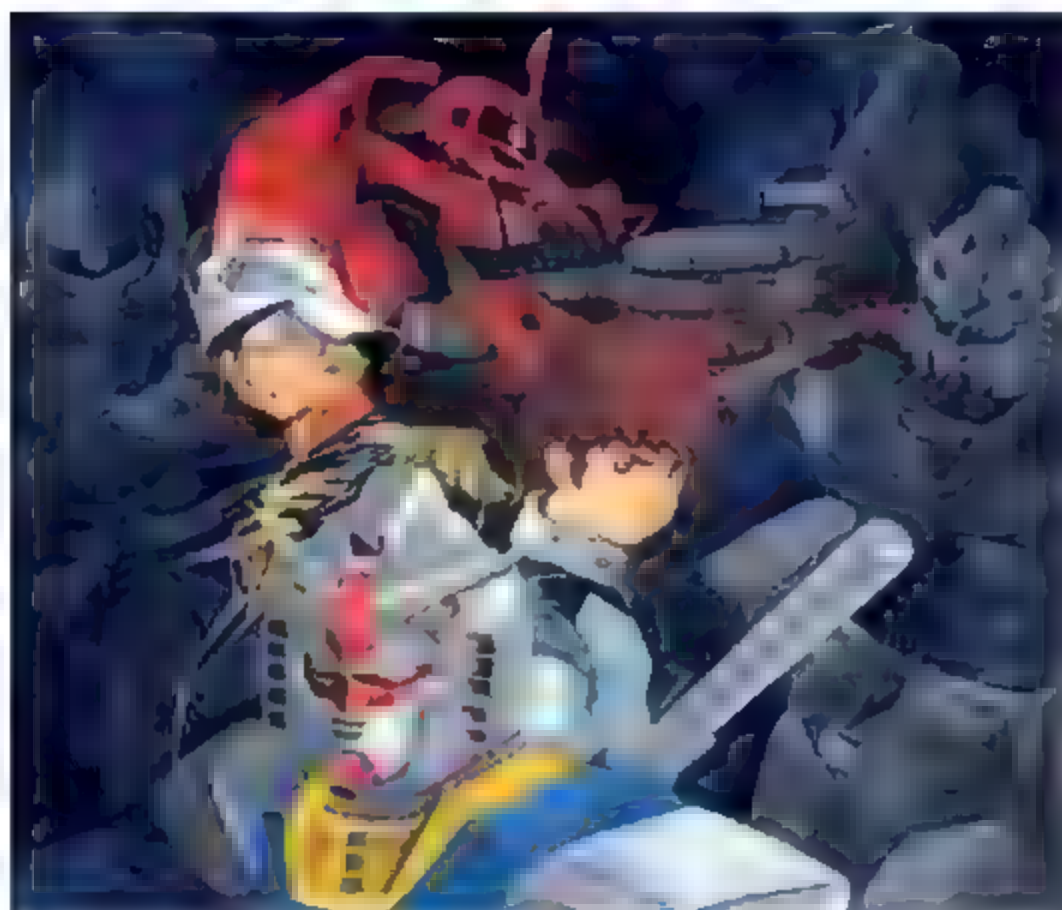
It was time for another try! 1993's *Victory Gundam* was an all-time-low. Once again it was an attempt at a darker story, but none of the characters were able to carry the show. The fans thought the mecha looked ridiculous, and the gist of the plot seemed to be just to introduce a new character and then to kill it. This misery lasted a total of 51 episodes, after which Tomino left Gundam at peace for a long time. There is still a rumor circling the fan base that Tomino wanted to get rid of Gundam and sabotaged his series on purpose.

## Alternate Universe and so on

The Universal Century timeline ended in V Gundam. After Tomino resigned, the producers called in a brain trust and created a new continuity, the Alternate Universe, which had little to do with the original Gundam. The first AU series *Kidou Butoden G-Gundam* (1994) told what was going on. Each colony had a mecha of its own: Neo-Holland's Gundam resembled a windmill, Neo-Sweden's Gundam was a blond woman, and Neo-Norway's Gundam was a viking. The colony that won the Gundam fighting tournament got charge of their politics. And all this happened in the series that originally brought harsh realism and unforgettable characters into mecha anime.

1995's *Gundam Wing* was a huge success that brought Gundam to the United States. The soundtrack featured the





synthesizer band Two-Mix with voice actress Minami Takayama as vocalist. The OP and ED songs Just Communication and Rhythm Emotion hit the right note. An animated music video was made of the theme song White Reflection of the OVA *Gundam Wing: Endless Waltz* (1997), but with no trace of Gundam in it. It seems that instead inspiration was drawn from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. White Reflection is a small masterpiece, and even to this day the only original AMV that stands comparison with *On Your Mark* directed by Miyazaki.

The 12-part OVA series *Kidō Senshi Gundam: Dai 08 MS Shotai* (08th MS Team, 1995-1999) is, perhaps surprisingly to all, the most noteworthy candidate as the best Gundam title of all. It was a battered, rough and comradely depiction of jungle warfare set in the time of the first Gundam series around the year 0080. Kunio Okawara stripped the Gundams of all extra glamor and shaped them into mass-produced war machines. The newtypes were gone, and normal human personalities acted as pilots. The series was delayed by several years, because the original director Tateyuki Kanda died during production. The last part did not come out until in 1999. The series was of high quality and carefully made, and it might be

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#### Universal Century:

*Kidō Senshi Gundam* (TV), 39 episodes (1979-1980)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam Movie Trilogy*, 135 min. (1981)

*Kidō Senshi Zeta Gundam* (TV), 50 episodes (1985-1986)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam ZZ* (TV), 47 episodes (1986-1987)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam: Gyakushuu no Char*, 124 min. (1987)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam 0080: Pocket no naka no Sensou*, 6-part OVA (1989)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam 0083: Stardust Memory*, 13-part OVA (1991)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam F91*, 115 min. (1991)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam 0083: Zeon no Zankou*, 120 min. (1992)

*Kidō Senshi Victory Gundam* (TV), 51 episode (1993-1994)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam: Dai 08 MS Shotai*, 12-part OVA (1996-1999)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam: Dai 08 MS Shotai – Miller's Report* OVA (1998)

*Kidō Senshi Zeta Gundam I-III*, 95 min. (2004-2006)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam MS IGLOO: Mokushiroku 0079*, 3-part OVA (2006)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam MS IGLOO 2: Juuryoku Sensen*, 3-part OVA (2008-2009)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam Unicorn*, 6-part OVA (2010)

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quite accurate to describe it as a Patlabor story set in the time of the Vietnam war. The OP theme *Arashi no naka de kagayaite* sung by Chihiro Yonekura is timeless, very much reminiscent of *Every Little Thing*.

In 2002 it was time to update Gundam to the current level of animation development. *Kidou Senshi Gundam SEED* was a remake of the first Gundam saga, to which changes were made to depict the changes of time. In the post-Cold War era the dividing of Earth into two rivalling superpowers would have been an old-fashioned solution. The frontlines did not exist so much between ideologies as inside each character.

During the civil war of the Cosmic Era the attitude towards genetic manipulation divided people. The Earth Alliance was in favor of naturality. Genetically enhanced people, the Coordinators, who were newtypes under their skin, were represented by an organization called ZAFT. The protagonist Kira Yamato is a Coordinator, who is drawn into the turmoil of the war and is forced to choose his side, even on many occasions. Character designer Masatsugu Iwase wanted to make Kira into a "spineless sissy, who couldn't look too childish". It's hard to form an opinion on that, but I remember seeing a sarcastic character map made of Gundam SEED's sequel *Gundam SEED Destiny*, in which every single one of the dozens of characters had exactly the same kind of copy-pasted face, just with a new hairstyle and hair color. That was well worth spending 33 million yens per episode. In its latest incarnation, Gundam Unicorn, the mecha have, oh yes, a horn on their helmets.

Gundam's lifespan is very typical for a long anime franchise. Started out as a risky venture, canceled mid-series, turned out to be a groundbreaking series gaining unpredictable value, slowly wearing out and carrying on as strange variations and remakes, among which there was the occasional gem. The same could apply just as well to *Lupin III*.

Funnily enough, the most successful Gundam title spawned from high school student Koji Yokoi's drawings, a yonkoma manga<sup>48</sup> *Super Deformed Gundam: a parody*, in which the Gundam characters were turned into chibi characters. Bandai lay hold of the invention, published Yokoi's parody manga in its *Model News* magazine, and turned it into an OVA series that aired from 1988 onwards, where Gundam's events and characters were the source of hilarious jokes. This silliness was seasoned with catch phrases such as "Boppin!" and "Amuro genki?", which caught on like wildfire. Games, toys and other merchandise made from SD Gundam soon started to make more money than the original Gundam, especially due to the fact that the cutesy characters fit perfectly into Gashapon vending machines. Insane numbers of SD Gundam games have been designed for all consoles and Game Boy versions. There

were over 300 different kinds of scale models created by 2007. In the 2000's a similar parody was made of *Gundam SEED*.

When estimating the influence of Gundam it would be easier to list what Gundam hasn't influenced. Gundam is Japan's very own *Star Wars*, a seminal work in its field, the classic of classics, and the object of national pride that never goes out of style. The biggest Japanese anime magazine *Newtype* took its name from Gundam. When space tourists started to receive package tour offers, in 2006 the Japanese business man Daisuke Enomoto wanted to book a trip to space wearing Char Aznable's helmet. The permission to wear the helmet was denied, and the businessman couldn't participate because he didn't pass the physical examination. In celebration of Gundam's 30th anniversary in 2009, a life-sized 18-meter Gundam monument was erected in Tokyo, whose head shone a light at night. It became a popular sight.

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#### Alternate Universe:

*Kidō Butoden G-Gundam* (TV), 49 episodes (1994-1995)

*Shin Kidō Senki Gundam Wing* (TV), 49 episodes (1995-1996)

*Shin Kidō Senki Gundam Wing: Operation Meteor*, 2-part OVA (1996)

*Kidō Shin Seiki Gundam X* (TV), 39 episodes (1996)

*Shin Kidō Senki Gundam Wing Endless Waltz*, 3-part OVA (1997)

*Shin Kidō Senki Gundam Wing Endless Waltz Special Edition* (87 min), 1998

▽ *Gundam* (TV), 50 episodes (1999-2000)

▽ *Gundam I: Chikyuu Kou*, 120 min. (2002)

▽ *Gundam II: Gekkou Chou*, 128 min. (2002)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam SEED* (TV), 50 episodes (2002-2003)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam SEED Destiny* (TV), 50 episodes (2004-2005)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam Seed Destiny Special Edition*, 4-part OVA (2006)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam SEED C.E. 73: Stargazer*, 3-part OVA (2006)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam 00* (TV), 25 episodes (2007-2008)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam 00 2nd Season* (TV), 25 episodes (2008-2009)

*Kidō Senshi Gundam 00 Special Edition*, 3-part OVA (2009-2010)

*Gekijōban Kidō Senshi Gundam 00 - A Wakening of the Trailblazer*, 120 min. (2010)

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Macross (1982)

## Macross

When everything else has already been tried, why not try and save the world with music?

It can not be overestimated how much the inclusion of the English words "Will you love me tomorrow?" in Macross's opening song in October 1982 meant for mecha anime. It was not just about the love triangle between Hikaru, Misa and Minmay, in which a fighter pilot has to choose between the captain of his ship and a celebrated pop idol.

In mecha anime this kind of celebration of love was unheard of, but the story is familiar in the sci-fi genre. As early as the 1970's, the fear of people changing into machines already dominated Keiko Takemura's *Terra e*, whose film version in 1980 did not hesitate in depicting the world ruled by reason as fascist. *Terra e*'s resistance movement strives for natural life, and their program includes for instance having babies by birthing. The government thinks such aims are barbaric and have to be stopped.

Macross turned into a completely unique, idealistic work, which took the realistic character depiction started by Gundam a step further. Macross was relationship drama disguised as mecha anime, and in its world a popular singer could be as significant a weapon as a fully-armed power suit of the latest fashion. Only in Japan.

In 1979 during Gundam's colorful early journey the tiny Studio Nue had created its own version of a mecha fighting series based in space. The show was named after Earth's capital ship Macross, and it was supposed to be a comedy. The first sponsor candidate went bankrupt, and only as late as 1982 the project got underway, when the advertising agency Big West was discovered as sponsor. The agency agreed to finance only 27 episodes though. Studio Nue had planned that the ship would be called Megaloadia, but as a big Shakespeare fan the Big West representative wanted to name it Macbeth. A fair compromise was made with Macross, derived from the word Macro.

The budget was minimal, as always in groundbreaking productions. The limits of the budget were especially visible in



such key scenes as in episode 11, where Lynn Minmay performs *Watashi no kare wa* pilot for the first time. Nonetheless the costs were about to get out of hand, and Big West decided to get help from Tatsunoko's subcontractors AnimeFriend and Star Pro, whose work did not amount to the soft and refined features of Haruhiko Mikimoto's characters. In return, Tatsunoko was given all international distribution rights. This was a fateful decision. Luckily animation was also outsourced to competent parties, such as character designer Haruhiko Mikimoto's employer Artland, AIC and Gainax.

Haruhiko Mikimoto was one of the people who worked around the clock at Artland. The animators slept for a couple of hours on the floor of the studio. "If I drew a picture of that theme, I've done it half asleep, because I can't remember anything," Mikimoto says. The results of working in the Twilight zone can be seen in the scene, where Hikaru blows up his way through Bodolza's ship. In one frame the missile looks like a can of Budweiser, in another it's a sake bottle. When left behind on the schedule the animators bought time with recap episodes, which were summaries of things seen so far compiled of old material. Episode 15 is a pure recap, and episode 17 is a recap with altered dialog, the protagonist's hallucination lasting the entire episode<sup>61</sup>.

No wonder the otaku have fun with mistakes they spot from *Macross*. It is understandable that sometimes the animators forgot to paint a few Valkyries or that the crew transport vehicle is green, as well as all the people inside it. But how can Misa have three hands? The joke in the first episode, in which a Valkyrie gone berserk in Tokyo crushes Studio Nue and Artland, became frighteningly ominous as the series progressed.

In the field of mecha desing, *Macross* introduced the perfect transformation (*kanzen henkei*), which its battle units, the Valkyries, were capable of. Engineering student Shoji Kawamori and Kazutaka Miyatake wanted the ships to function as jet fighters, mecha robots and as a hybrid of the two (*Ger-Walk*) depending on the situation. Invented by Shoji Kawamori on his ski vacation, the *Ger-Walk* was supposed to be an unvariable robot with flexible feet, but the industry was not impressed by his idea. As a backup solution they developed a hybrid of *Yamato* and *Gundam*, a transforming spaceship, which maintains and provisions the variable fighters. When months later the Takatoku toy company finished the prototype designed by Kawamori, the thing's joints broke in Kawamori's hands and its feet dropped into his lap. "Well, now it became a *Ger-Walk*", Kawamori chuckled<sup>62</sup>.

Under different circumstances Shoji Kawamori could have become a NASA engineer. However, in Japan there were no such job opportunities. The second best alternative was to become

a designer of fictional spacecraft. Kawamori's expertise led to the mecha being stripped of the last trace of decorativeness. Previously the mecha had been designed by first sketching a robot, which was then turned into its transformation. Kawamori did the exact opposite. He drew the transformed end result first, the F14 jet fighter, and then reworked it into a robot from its parts and features.

## Protoculture

In 1999 a gigantic, city-sized alien spaceship crashes on Earth. The technology of the spaceship, which turns out to be a battleship, is hundreds of years ahead of Earth, but within a decade Earth inhabitants become familiar with its principles and are able to make the ship functional again. This happens not a moment too soon, because the Zentradi who lost their ship arrive on Earth to claim what belongs to them. The original programming of the ship notices the attack, disregards the commands of the Earthlings and wipes out the visitors from the sky with its cannons. No wonder the Zentradi consider this kind of welcome as a declaration of war.

At last there is a protagonist in a mecha series who is not the only son of a dead mecha designer. Hikaru Ichijo (Arihiro Hase) is an acrobat pilot raised by his father, who joins the U.N. Spacy as suggested by his senpai Roy Focker (Akira Kamiya). In the course of the show, he rises to the rank of captain, partly due to his merit, partly because the senior officers he respects, die. He is not even the best pilot in his group, that title belongs to Maximilian Jenius (Sho Hayami). Hikaru is not devilishly calculating, like Char, and not overwhelmed by his emotions, like Rei. He is a new kind of character in mecha anime, a young man whom you could imagine having a life outside the fighter cockpit.

Brunette Misa Hayase (Mika Doi) is the daughter of a military family, who is appointed first officer of *Macross*.



*Macross* (1982)





Macross Plus (1994)

The relationship between Misa and Hikaru follows the old and reliable pattern of Hollywood comedies. The stormy and troublesome early journey smooths out when the two of them realize that they have a lot in common. Joint ordeals and dangers strengthen their bond until late in the series Hikaru realizes he loves Misa.

The third wheel is a blue-haired pop idol Lynn Minmay (Mari Ijima). She wins the Macross beauty pageant, becoming the ship's very own idol, who encourages fighters with her songs and raises their spirits, which has always been the duty of army entertainment platoons. Minmay is Hikaru's first crush, but at the same time she's unattainable. Minmay hesitates between Hikaru and her cousin Kaifun, and Hikaru says that his and Minmay's relationship would be impossible. The only solution would be for Minmay to quit her career, but who would support the Macross and Earth after that? Minmay does not belong to him. Minmay belongs to every one, because she has become an interpreter of the best features of humanity: love, hope and perseverance.

This kind of emotional hesitance is strange to the Zentradi. They use different kinds of ways in order to understand the culture of Earth inhabitants. Among other things, they send shrunk spies aboard the Macross. The spies capture Misa and Hikaru as test subjects and are baffled when they try to explain the concept of "love" and demonstrate it by kissing. Something like that existed in the ancient past of the Zentradi. It was called "Protoculture", but it was known only to the creators of the Zentradi, whoever they might have been. Do you mean you are the ones who created us?

A crucial turn of events takes place when the Zentradi female pilot Milia Fallyna (Eri Takena) infiltrates into the Macross to kill Maximilian Jenius. A knife fight turns into a fist fight, and the fist fight into groping, and Milia falls in love with Max. Their wedding aboard the Macross is televised all over the world making the Zentradi ponder about the possibility of peaceful co-existence. The shocked commander of the Zentradi responds by ordering the whole population of Earth to be destroyed. Those of the Zentradi who have been listening to Lynn Minmay's propaganda programs and are contaminated by the Protoculture must also be wiped out, which makes some of them switch sides. In the crucial final battle Lynn Minmay's song *Ai oboeteimasuka* (Do you remember love?) is broadcast to the Zentradi ships, and the song confuses them and stops the attack. Yet three quarters of humankind is destroyed. The Macross survives however. The surviving people and Zentradi start reconstruction together.

The story continues as Misa, Hikaru and Minmay, who is dumped by Kaifun, still have their own decisions to make. Since it is the love story of the century, Hikaru and Misa are not destroyed, but they survive and get married, and have a daughter Miku in 2013. Minmay follows them on a journey, whose purpose is to inhabit the universe. In 2016 the Macross vanishes into thin air in the galactic center. Who knows, maybe the seed of the Protoculture starts to sprout in other universes someday.

Unlike the movie versions of the other TV series, which are summaries of the shows, *Chojiku Josai Macross — Ai oboeteimasuka* (Super Dimensional Fortress Macross — Do you Remember Love, 1984) was a complete retelling of the events of the story. Shoji Kawamori said that the film should not be considered as part of the Macross timeline, but rather it is a movie that was made in the Macross universe, in the Macross time, for the people of Macross. In other words, it is Macross's own movie production, a semidocumentary depiction of the times of the Zentradi war. The film was supposed to end in Lynn Minmay's great concert, but the concert had to be drastically edited. In return, in 1987 a 30-minute OVA music video *Flashback 2012* was published featuring Lynn Minmay's songs. In the film's final scene the fan who is desperately trying to get Lynn Minmay's autograph is Shoji Kawamori himself.

Mari Ijima distinguished herself as Lynn Minmay's voice and the singer of the songs, becoming the first really great voice actress / singer idolized by the otaku. She never had any singles that could have been called hits, although she got to perform *Ai oboeteimasuka* on television on the TBS chart show *Best Ten*. Subsequent colleagues, such as Hekiru Shiina



and Nana Mizuki, have surpassed Ijima's chart achievements many times. Nowadays Mari Ijima lives and works in the United States. She played Lynn Minmay in the latest English dub of *Macross*.

Before *Macross*, anime music was military marches sung by children's choirs, cheerily sung children's songs or striking tunes roared by masculine men. *Macross* contained serious ballads and pop songs composed by Kentaro Hakeda that stood comparison with and could be listened to even outside the world of the series. Before *Macross*, only *Yamato* was able to achieve that in 1974, but that had been a one-off-thing.

After *Macross*, all anime soundtracks have contained pop and rock music, which has been performed without exception by the most famed artists in the Japanese music world. Today the artists who would dare to refuse the opportunity to advertise their songs regularly at a certain time of day for months to an audience, which more and more often is worldwide, are few and far between. Without the example set by *Macross*, anime soundtracks would hardly have contained such ambitious music and so many original soundtracks would not have seen the light of day, the most complete ones including even the creak of a door.

After *Macross*, the anime production teams have had to take into account the soundscape and music of the production as seriously as the characters, script, financing and merchandising. Nowadays record companies offer money to production teams, so that the artists they represent could be included in the series. If anyone asks what happened and how it is possible that stars earning tens of millions of yens make theme songs for some wretched cartoons, you can answer: Lynn Minmay happened.

## Robotech

After selling the international distribution rights to Tatsunoko, Big West nor Studio Nue had no idea what would be the result. Carl Macek's video company Harmony Gold bought *Macross*, *Southern Cross* and *Genesis Climber Mospeada*, three completely different kinds of mecha series based in different eras and different environments, and merged them into one 85-episode series called *Robotech*, which was supposed to be telling one complete story. *Southern Cross* was based after *Macross* to recount the new phases of the Zentradi war, and in *Genesis Climber Mospeada* the Earth space troops victoriously return home only to find one surviving guerilla, who had relentlessly fought despite the apathy of the Earthlings.

The shows weren't much edited. Macek garnered more negative attention with his translations and localizations. As a



*Macross Plus* (1994)

result, all the characters in the productions of Macek's Harmony Gold and Streamline Pictures received an English name. Ichijo was made Rick Hunter, Tokyo was New York, the lines were adapted to be more American, and of course all publications from *Lupin III* to *Laputa* were dubbed. "Macekred" became a synonym for a translation that was misleadingly erroneous, incredibly clumsy, or both.

Because of these kinds of changes anime fans held a grudge against Carl Macek for a long time, but his part in popularizing anime can not be denied. Whatever one thinks of his work, he was the man who brought anime to the United States. Through the free satellite channel Super Channel, *Robotech* introduced mecha anime in the late 1980's to the Europeans, whose national channels had not aired this kind of animation before. Those Europeans also included the Finns.

Carl Macek was more of a fan of these series than a businessman. He said "There were elements in *Macross*, which were totally foreign to American TV animation, but familiar from comic books and films. There was a realistic war story, in which the good guys get killed. There were robots and space battles, but the story is in fact a soap opera, in which the development of the relationships between the characters is emphasized. Three quarters of Earth's population is wiped out in the course of the series, but it is not violence for the sake of violence, but rather a crucial, serious turn of events. For Americans this was familiar from the *X-Men* or the *Terminator*. *Macross* was TV animation for people, who had thought they had outgrown TV animation. They had waited for this the whole time without knowing"<sup>71</sup>.



## Die, idol, die

Macross did not experience the difficulties of Gundam. It was a success from the start, and Big West was eager to make sequels to it, but Studio Nue persistently refused. They had other plans, and Shoji Kawamori did not want to spend the rest of his life making Macross. However, as Macross's 10th anniversary neared, Haruhiko Mikimoto and Ai Oboetemasuka's screenwriter Sukehiro Tomita were convinced, and with their help AIC produced a six-part OVA called Macross II. Studio Nue did not approve the production, and this pretty lame video animation shunned by the audience is not considered an official Macross production. The show was supposed to be canceled after four episodes, but in the United States it sold surprisingly well. Shoji Kawamori did not even bother to watch the show.

Finally Kawamori had to budge. He had tried to sell his new sci-fi love story to sponsors, but he was told it had better be Macross so that it would make money. Kawamori protested for a while, but in 1995 Macross Plus was born. It was the most impressive, most expensive and highest quality OVA of its time. On top of all, Macross Plus was the work that introduced the all-time greatest anime composer Yoko Kanno to the world. In Macross Plus the idea of the classic idol personalized by Lynn Minmay had been taken to the extreme and it had become a caricature of itself.

In the 1990's, technology was so advanced that the guaranteed, immaculate spotlessness of the idol could be offered in the form of a virtual idol. Talent agency HoriPro, which represents countless girl idols, introduced the first virtual idol Kyoko Date in 1996. She had her own made-up background history, desires, favorite color, measurements deemed proportionate (83-56-82), a horoscope and a bloodtype (!). She lived on the computer screen and posed in fan photos dressed scantily, but did not sing yet. Singing was achieved in 2004 when Yamaha developed the singing synthesizer application Vocaloid.

The virtual idol of Macross Plus is Sharon Apple, an immensely popular singer, who is a hologram created by a computer. She has everything you need, except for feelings, which she has to borrow from her manager Myung Fang Lone. The hottest star of the universe has to be exploited to the extreme, so an experimental, illegal and unstable artificial intelligence chip is installed into Sharon Apple's programming. Sharon's machine feelings turn out to be malevolent. She hypnotizes her audience and takes control of the Macross.

Before these events, we have met two master pilots, Isamu and Guld. Seven years ago these two childhood friends of Myung's have become bitter enemies in an accident, whose

true nature has remained unclear for them both. They meet after a long time on the planet Eden's colony, where they compete against each other by showcasing jet fighters made by two different manufacturers. The better model will be chosen to replace the dated fighters. This part of the story is based on actual events. A similar kind of competition was held in conjunction with the American ATF project in the 1980's.

After Sharon Apple goes berserk, Guld and Isamu forget their animosities and fly from Eden's colony to Earth. Guld challenges the new ship prototype Ghost X-9 controlled by Sharon Apple, and Isamu flies to destroy the crazed computer. Guld ends the battle by becoming a kamikaze. Sharon Apple's voice seduces Isamu and makes him fly to his death. At the last minute Myung's voice makes him snap out of it. Isamu destroys the Macross main computer and at the same time Sharon Apple, whose reflection in the final scene strokes Isamu's cheek as farewell.

The events take place in Eden. The latest achievement in science is an apple. What do we learn from this? Shoji Kawamori seems to be saying that the real, physical love is much better than the latest great achievements of technology. They may be fascinating and alluring to us, but you cannot trust them. We have taken a bite from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil a long time ago. It is high time to learn how to separate the two from each other.

The enchanting virtual idol that was essential to the story required a soundtrack as impressive as possible, and the role of the composer was given to the not yet well known Yoko Kanno, whose work on Please Save My Earth sufficed as proof of her talent. The OST of Macross Plus is one of the most exquisite soundtracks ever made in anime. The melodies vary from simply impressive (Voices) to complex songs developing by the minute (Torch Song), to songs verging on jazz or avant garde music (3 cm) and ambient (Coma). Information High is a rock hit, which seems to summarize the show's content in eight minutes. "I described to her what kind of music I needed, and she did something completely different. Except that it was exactly what I was looking for", Kawamori characterizes Kanno.

Yoko Kanno's music was performed by the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, except for the theme Dogfight, which was played by the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra. Sharon Apple's songs Voices, Information High and Idol Talk were performed by Akino Arai and the still mysterious Gabriela Robin (presumably Yoko Kanno herself). The nine-minute-long Torch Song that was used as the ending theme was sung by Mai Yamane.

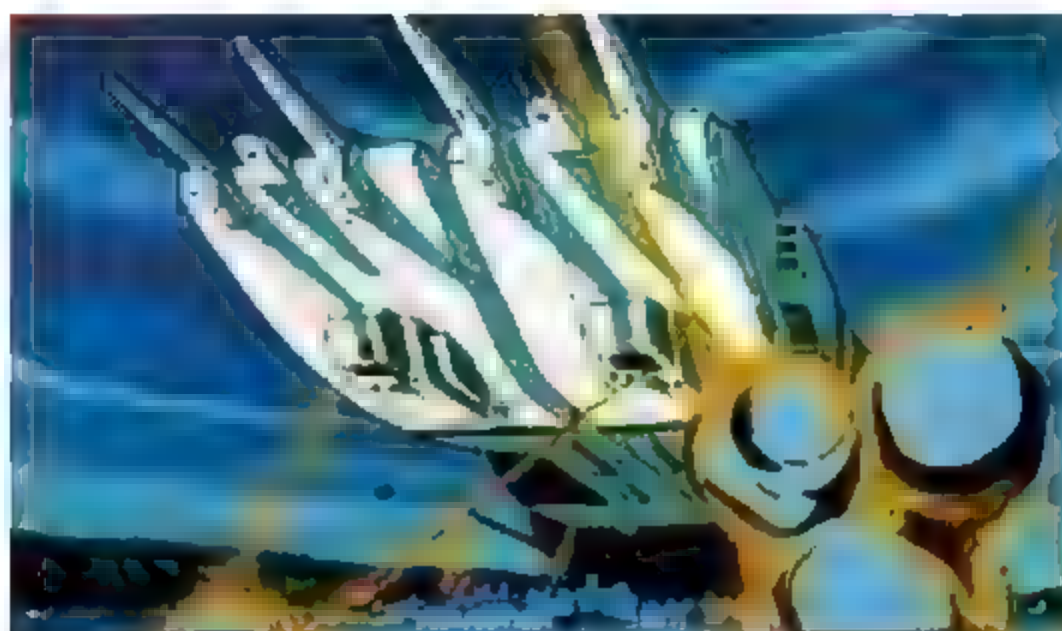
The character design by Gainax's Masayuki was notably more Western than Haruhiko Mikimoto's style. Masayuki's





Macross 7 (1994)





Macross (1982)

characters had protruding jaws and prominent noses. Yasuo Otsuka has described these styles as extrovert and introvert. Typical extrovert artists, who draw limbs long and thin with shovel-sized hands or feet include for instance Mad Magazine's Mort Drucker and Cocco Bill's Jacovitti. Introvert artists, who prefer to make their characters walking barrels, include the likes of Asterix's Uderzo.

### You think you can heal the world by playing the guitar?

Macross 7 brought Macross back on TV in 1994. The clock was turned 35 years forward. It is the year 2045, and humanity has built the seventh Macross called the Macross 7. It is composed of two parts, Battle 7 and City 7, which together form the Battle City 7. On the deck of this ship we meet Maximilian and Miliari's seventh daughter Mylene Jenius. In the seventh year of the Macross 7's journey... (What? I haven't even told you yet that the groovy OP song is called Seventh Moon.)

Macross 7 was indeed quite a light Macross variation. The pilots, led by protagonists Basara Nekki and rock group singer Mylene Jenius (Tomo Sakurai) did honor the original series by acting the story of Ai oboeteimasuka in one of the episodes. But everything else is new. The complete transformation of the Valkyrie means that Basara Nekki (Nobutoshi Hayashi) mimics playing an electric guitar with his transforming ship, plays it fast and cheekily, and blasts his music from the ship's massive speakers. "It worked with Lynn Minmay," protests the scolded Basara after showcasing his technique for the first time.

The appearance of a new enemy, meaning the never-before-seen Protodeviln race, makes the commanders think twice. Basara's mecha guitar technique works on the enemies surprisingly well, making the U.N. form a Sound Force group, which is compiled of Basara's band mates from the Fire Bomber. Investigations show that Basara's technique produces sound

energy, to which the enemies are vulnerable. Sound boosters are placed on the shoulders of the Sound Force Valkyries. The show, ridiculous even for a mecha anime, sold so well that the story was continued with a 3-part OVA and a movie. The TV series spanned 49 episodes, in which absolutely nothing happened, but the music was energetic. A certain similarity was present in the album titles: Dynamite Fire!!, Second Fire!!, Acoustic Fire!! and even Let's Fire!!. Macross 7 made Tomo Sakurai a celebrated singer and a sought-after voice actor, while most of Mylene Jenius's songs were performed by Chie Kajiura.

The latest Macross TV series is Macross Frontier, produced in honor of the 25th anniversary of the franchise. It is yet again a love triangle faithful to tradition, played by pilot Alto Saotome (Yuuichi Nakamura), pop idol Sheryl Nome (Aya Endo) who is known by the nickname "the Galactic Fairy", and Ranka Lee (Megumi Nakajima), a teenage girl dreaming of becoming a pop idol. The events take place in 2059, when the 25th Macross colony fleet Macross Frontier approaches the center of the Milky Way galaxy. The plot contains more political tension and drama than the previous Macross titles. In celebration of the old shows, the series contains music from previous Macross productions in addition to new songs. The OP song Triangler, composed by Yoko Kanno and sung by Maaya Sakamoto, hit number three on the Oricon Charts in the week it came out. This is something Lynn Minmay never achieved.

Most space soap operas shouldn't be taken seriously. Their inconsistency and impossibility are the object of open ridicule. Macross is an exception to this too. It is forgiven for those flaws. Whether the reason for that is the sympathetic nature of the little Studio Nue, Shoji Kawamori's bold design or the humanity of the story, but Macross is always warmly referred to. It is a mecha anime that believes in human.

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**Cho Jiku Yosai Macross** (TV), 36 episodes (1982-1983)

**Cho Jiku Yosai Macross: Ai oboeteimasuka**, 115 min. (1984)

**Macross: Flashback 2012 OVA** (1986)

**Cho Jiku Yosai Macross II - Lovers Again**, 6-part OVA (1992)

**Macross Plus**, 4-part OVA (1994)

**Macross Plus Movie Edition**, 115 min. (1995)

**Macross 7** (TV), 49 episodes (1994-1995)

**Macross 7 Encore**, 3-part OVA (1994)

**Macross 7 The Movie: Ginga ga ore wa yonderu!** 30 min. (1995)

**Macross Dynamite 7**, 4-part OVA (1997-1998)

**Macross Zero**, 5-part OVA (2002)

**Macross Frontier** (TV), 25 episodes (2007-2008)

**Gekijoban Macross F: Itsuwari no Utahime**, 120 min. (2009)

**Gekijoban Macross F: Sayonara no Tsubasa**, 2010

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# 10. THE GOLDEN AGE OF GHIBLI



Tonari no Totoro (1988)



The worlds of anime can be quite exclusive. The artwork of the imagery can be amazing and the animation technique perfect, but that world is so far away from the viewers, that they should not imagine that it is for them. That world belongs to fearless space warriors, world champions of mahjong, and comical or tragical superheroes, who travel in dimensions where even a bicycle can reach the speed of over 9 000 km/h.

Things are done differently in Studio Ghibli's films. Even in the most fantastic of Ghibli's worlds you can find moments, in which

the viewer is given room. The viewers of a Ghibli film always get a chance to feel that they are welcome to enter this world and take it as their own. There aren't many to refuse that invitation.

At its best a Ghibli film makes us say the greatest thing one can say about storytelling: "I haven't heard this story before, but I recognize it." Kiki, who is ashamed of her plain black dress and is watching television on the street through a store window, is every girl at every moment in every city. We have seen her. We have been in that situation ourselves. The Ghibli film reminds us of that.

Many Ghibli films from Totoro to Mononoke, and from Only Yesterday to Pom Poko, feature man's eternal longing to simpler, safer and warmer time, which of course is an illusion. There never was such a time. Miyazaki and Takahata are well aware of that. According to Miyazaki, nostalgia is one of those



Hayao Miyazaki



things that makes us human, and therefore it is difficult to define. That is why there is no need to efface it either. At the same time, Miyazaki has certain opinions on to which direction the world should develop, and he has many of them.

If it is so, that the stimulus for creativity requires conflicts, then Miyazaki's conflicts have been especially fruitful. He is an ecological pacifist, whose uncle's factory manufactured fighter plane parts during the war. He is a known leftist, who realized when reading Sanpei Shirato's *The Legend of Kamui* that Marxist materialism with its class struggles is nonsense. In his films he depicts the co-operation of people with admiration, but is himself a howling bully in his studio. He wants to make optimistic, encouraging and delightful films for children, and at the same time he is an outspoken development pessimist, who has said he'd gladly see Tokyo flooded by water and highways growing weed as tall as man. "There will be a time when we are not able to fix air conditioners, electricity will no longer run and we say 'This box used to be a television, moving pictures were shown on it.' I don't like it that people assume that things will develop in the same direction as before."<sup>102</sup> Miyazaki thinks that a complete collapse is possible, because it has happened before. In the last century alone it happened twice: first in the 1923 Great Kanto earthquake and then at the end of World War II.

After Tezuka, Miyazaki was the first Japanese animator who was able to rise to international fame. In an era when classic feature-length animations were believed to have perished around the world, Miyazaki brought them back practically single-handedly. He is a perfectionist, who demands a lot but does not spare himself either. If he were merely a preacher he could be ignored, but he does more than that. His movies are rich. You can draw much from them, and the worlds he created are thoroughly thought through, beautifully constructed and attractive in themselves. That is what he should focus on if he plans to continue, since in the 2000's Miyazaki's ecological ethos does not contain even a trace of the daring or radical, which it probably still had in the 1970's.

One of Miyazaki's characteristics is that he doesn't know and may not want to know how his films end. They are developed in storyboards as the work progresses. Often the end solution reveals itself at the last moment. This has led to the silliness, that when the film is finished, a script is written of it just for the archives so that the securing of the character copyrights can be done by the book.

## Nausicaä

By 1983 Hayao Miyazaki had taken part in the production of nine feature-length animations and twenty TV series.



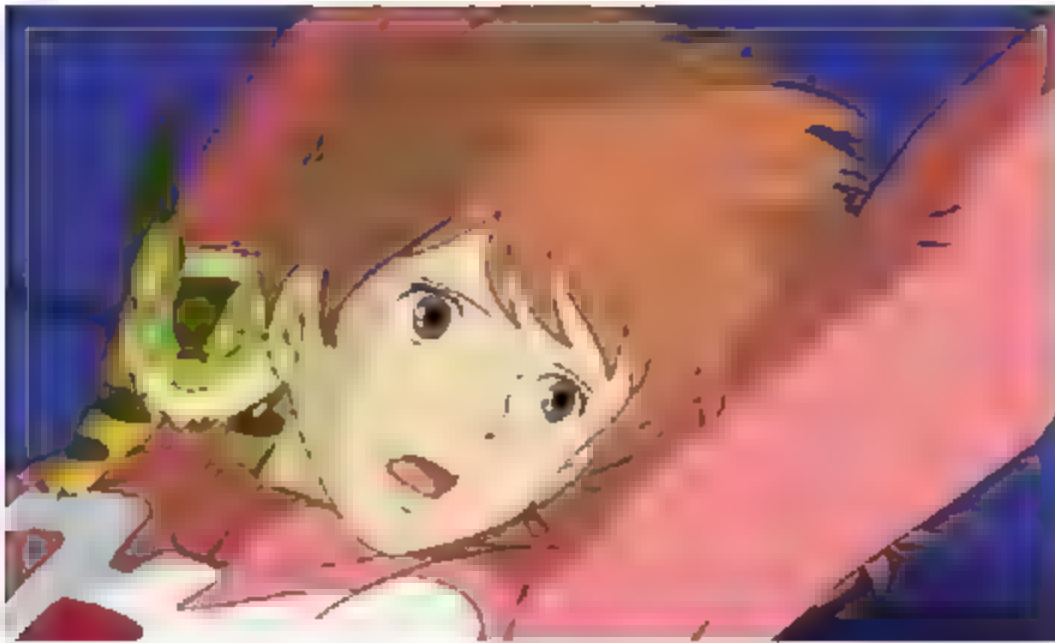
Kaze no tani no Naushika (1984)

The half-hour long episodes of Panda Kopanda that were created between 1972-1973 did not belong to either group. During his twenty-year-long career Miyazaki had not had the opportunity to make a single movie, whose characters, script and direction had been completely his own creation. Closest to Miyazaki's own animation were Panda Kopanda and the TV series *Future Boy Conan*, which was made for NHK in 1978. The Lupin film *The Castle of Cagliostro* was magnificent, but it was obvious from Miyazaki's *Fujiko*, that *Monkey Punch's* characters were not Miyazaki's own. He just isn't the kind of person, who would utilize the chemistry between *Fujiko* and *Lupin* as slapstick comedy and lewd jokes. He would have thrived in a lyrical adventure animation. That wasn't done in Japan yet.

It wasn't done anywhere else either. There was perhaps just one old-time adventure animation made in the 1970's, whose productional values were sound. It was Martin Rosen's *Watership Down*, made in England in 1978. Disney was in hibernation during the whole decade, and probably the next one as well. However, there would have been demand for these kinds of films. In the proto-internet of the early 1990's a rumor circled the usenet groups of university students that in Japan some guy makes the kinds of films that Disney has forgotten how to make a long time ago. Does anyone know anything about him? In 1993 *Porco Rosso* was presented to the audience at the Annecy International Animation Film Festival, and we began to know something.

Their curiosity was fuelled even more by *Nausicaä's* clumsy English-language video dub, which was shortened by 32 minutes (!) into a more fast-paced story, in which *Nausicaä* was called "princess Zandra". Who wouldn't want to see the original version that wasn't available anywhere? For a long time, other Miyazaki movies were also unavailable, because the *Warriors of the Wind* video made Miyazaki suspicious of





Kaze no tani no Naushika (1984)

western distributors. Ghibli's stance on the video was stylishly curt: what if we just forgot that it was ever made.

Miyazaki's first own film, *Kaze no tani no Naushika* (*Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*) got started in a weak moment of his. The extensive, surprisingly European fantasy manga drawn in detail by the unemployed animator was published in *Animage* magazine in February 1982, garnered popularity among the readers and got the attention of the publisher, Tokuma Shoten. They asked Miyazaki would it be alright with him if the manga was turned into an animated film.

The witness reports are conflicting. According to the artbook *The Art of Nausicaä*, *Animage* magazine agreed to Miyazaki's strict condition that the manga would not be used as basis for an animation in the future.<sup>103</sup> Studio Ghibli's Toshio Suzuki says he remembers that Miyazaki started to draw the manga particularly for the reason, that it would be impossible to find financing for a film, whose story was not available as a manga.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, *Animage* brought up the matter and suggested a 15-minute short film. Miyazaki's counter-offer was a 60-minute OVA, which he could direct. Tokuma Shoten replied by upping the stakes and suggesting a feature film. Years later Miyazaki said "We didn't make *Nausicaä* into a film because I necessarily wanted so, but because it was the only story I had to offer at the moment." One thing is for sure: Miyazaki wanted to be in control of the prospective film.

Financing wasn't a problem. Tokuma Shoten's Yasutoshi Tokuma supported Miyazaki completely. In addition, Miyazaki's brother's advertising agency was willing to invest in the venture. There was no studio though, but it could always be rented. Top Craft, to whom the Americans had outsourced their animation (e.g. the *Last Unicorn*), suited well. The animators were found through a classified ad in *Animage*. They were hired on a project-basis only for this one film and were paid by the frame. It was a mixed group of people, but it consisted

of competent professionals. The key animators included the likes of Hideaki Anno, Yoshinori Kanada and Yoichi Kotabe. Miyazaki's trusted voice actress Sumi Shimamoto, who had also played Clarisse in the *Castle of Cagliostro*, played the role of Nausicaä.

"Sumi Shimamoto was incredible," Miyazaki applauded. "Especially Nausicaä's dream of her childhood. The line 'Mother is here too' was so alive, so real I was touched. People worked hard, even though I yelled at them. I yelled all the time! Top Craft was under the impression that Hayao Miyazaki was a scary guy who makes people work hard, so I took advantage of that. Mitsuki Nakamura never went home or slept. He fell asleep at his desk holding a brush. And he never complained, even when he had to redo his work."<sup>105</sup>

They had no clue as to who would be the composer. The intention was to have the soundtrack composed by an established household name. As they were searching for this renowned composer, the record company suggested songs, written by a minimalist composer, for the image album's characters songs. The composer was the completely unknown Joe Hisaishi, who had written by then his only anime compositions in the 1970's under his own name Mamoru Fujisawa. Miyazaki listened to the songs, played them to the others at the studio and insisted with Takahata, that this man should compose the soundtrack for *Nausicaä*. That's how began the continuous, decades-long collaboration between Miyazaki and Hisaishi.

During the war that was fought a thousand years ago, The Seven Days of Fire, the God Warriors destroyed the world. The Toxic Jungle has since then expanded wider and wider, spreading its deadly spores. If people tried to destroy it, giant insects, the Ohmu (literally "king insect") would take revenge.

Nausicaä is a princess in a small kingdom, which is occupied by the military power of Torumekia. Torumekia plans to use the last remaining God Warrior found during an archeological excavation. He must be used, so that others won't have time to use him. That's realpolitik. Nausicaä, who goes on explorations and studies plants in her laboratory, finds out that the deadly desert is nature's way of purifying pollution. Deep in the middle of it there is a forest turned into stone, where the purification is finalized. Nature has an unlimited supply of time to mend itself, people do not. That's ecology.

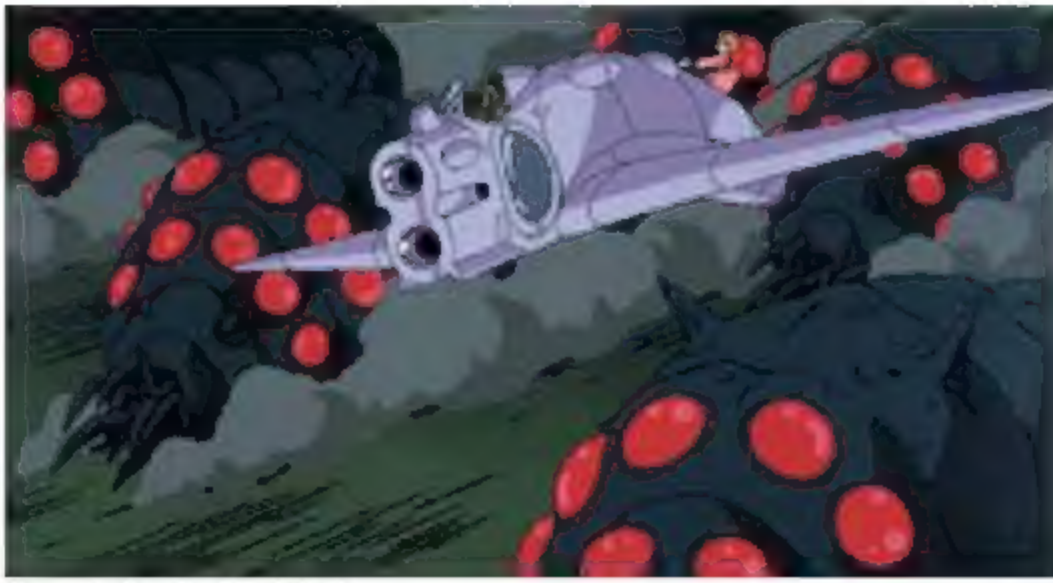
The second half of *Nausicaä* is a war film, in which nature has the most powerful army on its side. The God Warrior commanded by Princess Kushana decays and collapses. People can be saved from the wrath of the Ohmu only by Nausicaä, who furiously places herself in front of the storming mass of insects and flies into the air. The Ohmu realize their mistake





Kaze no tani no Naushika (1984)





Kaze no tani no Naushika (1984)

and using their tentacles they pick up Nausicaä, who is wearing a dress dyed blue from the blood of the Ohmu, just as it was foretold in the old prophecies.

The aspect of the manga that dealt with superpower politics, the war between Dorok and Torumekia, remains completely undeveloped in the film. In the film there is only a glimpse of the manga Nausicaä that seeks the ultimate answers. The great questions were so great, that Miyazaki did not finish his manga until 1994. It is remarkable how the reputation of the film version has survived, even though the manga has walked all over it and pretty much wiped its feet on it. The early torso of Nausicaä that was turned into a film is on the other hand the only Nausicaä that was possible to adapt into a feature film. Turning the whole manga into a film would be completely impossible even for Miyazaki himself. In the worst-case scenario, someone will turn it into a TV series after he dies, like what happened to Tezuka's Phoenix, but we'll just have to cross that bridge when we come to it.

At the premiere on March 11, 1984 Nausicaä was a shock. 56 708 cels were used in the film, the colors were breathtaking and the dynamics of the narrative was solid. The film's action was rich and the quiet scenes perfectly hasteless. The film followed Yasuo Otsuka's old principle, according to which fast must be fast and slow must be slow in animation. Miyazaki's old role model, Russian Lev Atamanov was visible in the softness of the motion. The cast of characters with the comical sidekicks was textbook Disney. Yet the result was undeniably unique. Nausicaä cannot be compared with anything else than Miyazaki's other films. But Miyazaki was not happy. In an interview made for the Nausicaä Roman Album in May 1984 he squirmed uncomfortably because of the ending. «When the Ohmu raise Nausicaä up and she bathes in the golden morning sun, the image becomes a religious painting! I glanced at Mitsuki Nakamura, and we said to each other: «We have a problem.» All this time I have wondered if there could've been another kind of ending. -- I didn't want Nausicaä to become the maid



of Orléans and I tried to eliminate all religious undertones. -- Nausicaä wanted to stop the Ohmu, but you cannot stop that kind of a mass, and then it happened like it happened.»<sup>106</sup>

Miyazaki was so troubled by the miracle that was needed at the end of Nausicaä, that he wanted to fix it 13 years later. Of course the fixing didn't completely succeed. Princess Mononoke's end result justifiably raises the question that isn't there an even bigger miracle there compared to Nausicaä.

The movie was in theaters for three months, gathered an audience of 910 000 people and produced 700 million yen. It was good, but a smash hit would've required a bit more. The most important thing was that the polls conducted in Toei cinema showed that 97 % of the audience liked what they saw. This indicated that animated feature films could compete with films with actors as equals, and also attract adult viewers as well. If a rough draft such as Nausicaä was able to get this kind of reception, what would happen if the movie really succeeded? More of these should be made.

That was exactly what Miyazaki intended. He wanted Nausicaä to be a model of the way in which feature-length animations should be made. Almost the entire Nausicaä production team moved to the newly-established animation studio, whose leadership was assumed by Toshio Suzuki from Tokuma Shoten. Naturally Nausicaä's producer Isao Takahata followed along. This common effort of these three power figures would be known by the name of the old Italian aircraft Ghibli, the desert wind. It would become a new wind that would blow through the Japanese animation industry.

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**Kaze no tani no Naushika** (Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind), 116 min. (4.3.1984)

direction, screenplay and character design: Hayao Miyazaki

producer: Isao Takahata

music: Joe Hisaishi

studio: Top Craft

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Tenkuu no shiro no Laputa (1986)

## Laputa

Studio Ghibli's first film *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* (*Tenkuu no shiro Rapyuta*) premiered on August 2, 1986. Since then, Miyazaki has not made an adventure film as complete and compact as *Laputa*, a film that doesn't have anything excess in it. Nothing in it is forced. It is a noteworthy candidate as the best animated feature film of all times, and the shortlist for the competition is short.

As everybody knows, the name *Laputa* derives from *Gulliver's travels*, but the story is more of a Jules Verne story than Jonathan Swift. One evening in the late 19th century, Dola's clan of sky pirates, which is led by the vivacious old lady of the family, attacks a secret service airship, where a girl named Sheeta is held captive. The girl escapes and falls down from the sky. Sheeta's heirloom, a levitation stone, softens her fall. It places Sheeta carefully down in a mining shaft on the arms of a young boy called Pazu. In May 1985 Hayao Miyazaki traveled around Wales making sketches, which were used as a basis for the softly-colored mining city of the film.

The levitation stone is the last remainder of the legendary flying castle of *Laputa*, and a key to its secrets. When the stone

is activated in Sheeta's hands, it points towards *Laputa* and revives the frighteningly destructive robots that fell from the sky and were presumed dead. The sincere but dishonest sky pirates want to go to *Laputa* to find its treasures, government agent Muska wants to access its ancient war technology, and Sheeta and Pazu have to think up how to make sure that *Laputa* stays untouched. A bulk of the film follows this exciting and eventful pursuit. We reach *Laputa* only after an hour and 25 minutes, and the time before that practically flew by.

*Laputa* combines all Miyazaki's familiar themes: the deadly secrets of ancient civilizations, the unyielding force of nature, imaginative and funny airships, fantasy animals and gigantic robots. The giant robots of *Laputa* have been seen before, in the final episode of the second *Lupin III* TV series, no. 155, *Farewell My Dear Lupin* (1979). In it Miyazaki was not able to use the robot like he wanted to, so he gave it a new chance in *Laputa*. In *Laputa* the robots were accompanied by the fox-squirrels familiar from *Nausicaä*. The idea for the levitation stone came from Tetsuji Fukushima's manga *Sabaku no mao* from the 1950's. The later adventures of Dola and her sky pirates are recounted in *Porco Rosso*.

Human life is a union of the sky and the earth. Pazu is truly





Tenkuu no shiro no Laputa (1986)

a boy of the earth, a mining apprentice in the tunnels, whose admiration for the sky girl is mixed with a trace of fear. Pazu's first words to Sheeta were: "I was afraid you're an angel or something." Uncle Pom who roams the caves, thinks Sheeta and Pazu are devil's children when he first meets them. But sky girl and earth boy are not so different after all. Deep in the mining tunnels they see another kind of space, the starry sky of the rock full of glistening stones, the veins of the levitation stone, the same stuff Sheeta's pendant is made of. If the way to the sky exists, it goes through the depths of earth. It is fit that when they finally reach Laputa they find — a grave. Man's duality, the possibility of striving to become either an angel or a devil, is made perfectly clear in the discussion, in which Colonel Muska demands Sheeta to become his wife and co-ruler and blasts her braids in half. Laputa is the empire of fear. Laputa's fire destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, Laputa is mentioned in the Ramayana as Indra's arrow, and Laputa sank Atlantis. Laputa's power is humanity's dream, that is why it will always be born again, Muska says. His observation is painfully indisputable.

But there is another way, the way that made the Laputians abandon their castles in the sky. According to the old Laputian song that Sheeta knows, humans need roots on the ground. When the self-destruction button has been pushed, all that remains of Laputa is a tree. Its roots have reached the deep

core of Laputa, and in those roots Pazu pushes on when the stones collapse. The most exquisite achievements of humanity are no more than flying castles, which can be eroded by a single tree.

So what to do? Miyazaki's solution is to encapsulate Laputa and send it out of reach. What remains of Laputa stays on its orbit as a dream and a phantom; like the ancient imperial Japan, with a value and beauty of its own, but which would be devastating to the real world. It's okay to have big dreams, just don't make the mistake of trying to realize them. Everyday job in a boring reality has always been more respectable in Miyazaki's mind. People don't need much, just a knife, bread and a lamp to search your kind, like Azumi Inoue sings in the film's ending theme *Kimi wo nosete*, which was of course composed by Joe Hisaishi and whose lyrics were written exceptionally by Hayao Miyazaki.

There is one more thing to be considered, which is the most controversial of all, because it is a fancy of personal history, which should be used sparingly. Pazu's father was the only person to photograph Laputa. When Pazu searches on his glider for the way inside the flying castle hidden by the storm, his father's ghost leads the way. A question arises to what extent has the technologically advanced and destructive Laputa a dream of Miyazaki's father, his own flying castle?





**Jari Lehtinen**

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